

AboutRespiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

What is RSV?

RSV is a viral disease of the lungs. While RSV primarily infects children, it can infect people of all ages. In babies, young children, and adults with weakened immune systems, RSV may result in lower respiratory infection and pneumonia, and these infections may become very serious. In older children and healthy adults, RSV resembles the common cold. RSV is so common that most people have been infected with RSV by age 2.

How is RSV spread?

RSV is spread by respiratory droplets from close contact with infected persons or contact with contaminated surfaces or objects. Infection can occur when RSV contacts the eyes, mouth, or nose, and possibly through inhaling droplets from a sneeze or cough.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

In babies and young children, symptoms include fever, wheezing, difficulty breathing, and pneumonia. In older children and adults, symptoms include moderate-to-severe cold-like symptoms such as fever, runny nose, cough, and sometimes wheezing. Symptoms generally appear from 2-8 days following exposure.

How is RSV diagnosed?

Your health care provider will review your symptoms and may take a swab specimen of your throat or the back of your nose for laboratory testing.

How is RSV treated?

For mild disease, no specific treatment is needed other than to relieve symptoms (pain reliever, fever reducer). Patients with severe disease may require oxygen therapy or hospitalization. Ribavirin aerosol may be used in the treatment of some patients with severe disease. Your health care provider can recommend the best treatment.

How can RSV be prevented?

- Wash your hands properly and frequently, especially after coughing or sneezing.

- Do not share items such as cups, drinking glasses, and eating utensils.
- Exclude children from schools and daycare settings if they have respiratory symptoms with fever and limit their contact with other children. (Excluding children who have respiratory symptoms without fever and who are well enough to attend daycare or school will probably not decrease the transmission of RSV.) Almost 100 percent of children who attend daycare will get RSV during their first year of life.
- Promptly dispose of any used tissues after coughing or sneezing.

When are outbreaks most common?

RSV outbreaks generally occur during the winter months (November-April).

For additional information on RSV, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Web site at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/respiratory/rsvfeat.htm>

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